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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

25 September 1970

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Likely Soviet Reactions to Possible US or Israeli
Actions Concerning Jordan

SOVIET CONSIDERATIONS

1. The turn of events in Jordan is not at all welcome to Moscow. The Soviets lent themselves to the US peace initiative, among other reasons, because it offered a means of imposing increased control over military developments on the Suez front. The Soviets must have believed that the Syrians and the Palestinian guerrillas could be prevailed on to go along, or, could at least be prevented from disrupting Soviet-UAR tactics. If so, the Soviets were wrong. As a result, the prospects for talks, from which they hoped to extract concessions from the US and Israel, have been hurt, perhaps fatally. (This result was, of course, helped by the Soviets' own failure to hold back the Egyptians from forward moves in the Canal zone.) The chances of the Russians being able to impose some discipline to their own liking on the current

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pattern of political and military events and of being able to keep their various Arab clients in line in the future is diminished. And the tactical play becomes complicated for the Russians because of the unpredictability of the other players, not only the Arabs, but the US and Israelis as well.

2. For these reasons, the Russians can probably be believed when they say that they have spent some effort to prevent the events in Jordan from happening. At this stage, they would have preferred a simpler Middle East contest involving Nasser and themselves against the US and Israel. They would no doubt like to see these players put back in their previous positions and will try, if they can, to bring this about. It must now be evident to them, however, that it will be virtually impossible to resume the game in this manner, even if there is no US or Israeli intervention in Jordan.

3. The warnings which the Russians were bound to sound at any hint of US or Israeli intervention are partly reflex action. It is also a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained, for, if it turns out that there is no such intervention, the Russians can and will say that they were the deterrent. But they must also think that intervention remains a possibility and this must arouse

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mixed feelings. It would support the Soviet line that US and Israeli policies toward Arab nationalism are collusive and equally malign. Some political benefits would fall automatically to the Soviets. But intervention would, at the same time, put pressure on the Russians to demonstrate the practical value of their advocacy of the Arab cause.

4. We would expect the USSR to exercise care to see that the issue did not turn into a momentous political test between it and the US and to minimize the likelihood of direct engagement between its military forces and those of either the US or Israel. But the Russians would also feel the need to show that, because of their expanded role in the area, the balance of forces was no longer what it was when US forces landed in Lebanon in 1958 or when the 1967 war broke out, and they might be inclined to accept certain risks on that account.

SOVIET BEHAVIOR IN CERTAIN CONTINGENCIES

5. With these considerations in mind, we examine below possible Soviet responses in three contingencies: (1) an Israeli attack on Syrian and fedayeen forces in northern Jordan; (2) a broader Israeli military operation into Syria proper; and (3) a US rescue operation centered on the Amman area. We treat the three

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as more or less distinct operations, although it is recognized that they might not in practice remain such, since, for instance, (1) might grow into (2) or (3) might overlap with (1).

AN ISRAELI ATTACK INTO JORDAN

6. As has already been suggested, the recent actions of the Palestinian guerrillas and the Syrians do not fit the Soviet book and the Russians would not be entirely unhappy to see them taught a lesson. There is substantial evidence of Soviet distrust of the Syrians and apprehension over the fedayeen as an uncontrollable element in the whole confrontation. Moscow might hope that a setback would make them more amenable to Soviet advice in the future, and the Russians would see in the defeat of the Arab forces by the Israelis an occasion for renewing their strictures against premature and uncoordinated military actions.

7. All this aside, the Israeli operation would, of course, be represented by Moscow as having been carried out with US approval and encouragement and would provide Moscow with propaganda ammunition against the US throughout the Arab world. The Soviets would make urgent and conspicuous diplomatic representations at the UN

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and in Western capitals which would be intended to keep the Israeli action within limited bounds and win some credit for the USSR if it should so remain.

8. The Russians would almost certainly attempt to reinforce this point by taking certain military actions of a largely demonstrative kind. This might entail the dispatch of some additional units to the Soviet Mediterranean squadron and the movement of some elements of the squadron toward the Syrian coast. The Russians would raise warnings against Israeli encroachment on Syrian territory and would probably seek ways -- by sending a high-level military delegation to Syria, or even by sending token air or ground units -- to give the impression that Moscow was prepared to give the Syrians significant assistance in the defense of their territory.

9. Israeli intervention in northern Jordan would probably quickly result in the routing of Palestinian and Syrian forces there (and the Iraqis as well, if they should happen to become engaged). The Israelis would presumably not linger on Jordanian territory, but even if they did, there would be little the Russians could or would do to dislodge them. For these reasons, the Soviets would in responding to Israeli intervention probably

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attempt to strike in both their diplomatic and military actions a stern but statesmanlike attitude. They would probably see no advantage in inflaming the situation at the risk of being caught bluffing and of encouraging the Syrians and Palestinians to believe that they would have Soviet support for future ventures. Better that they should be able, without having appeared altogether craven, to say "I told you so" to the Arabs while winning some credit in other quarters, including the US, for having behaved with some degree of responsibility.

ISRAELI ACTION IN SYRIA

10. In the event that Israeli operations against the Syrian and fedayeen forces now in north Jordan spilled over into Syria itself, Soviet reactions would probably not be greatly different from those discussed in the preceding paragraphs. A more ambitious effort, involving a major Israeli assault on Syria, is not likely. The Israelis would foresee a much heightened risk of direct Soviet involvement, as would we. But, should the Israelis, nonetheless, embark on such a course, the Russians would be unwilling to accept the prospect of the overthrow of the Syrian regime and they would

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probably conclude that the protection of their position in the Middle East required a vigorous military reaction. They would accept the risk that this might lead in some way to US military countermeasures.

11. The nature of the Soviet military response would, of course, depend on how far and how fast the Israelis moved into Syria. In any event, however, we would expect the Soviets to reinforce their Mediterranean squadron and to move a substantial part of it into Syrian waters. They might signal the seriousness of their intent by putting the combat contingent embarked with the squadron ashore in, say, Latakia. The Soviet MIG pilots now on training duty in Syria might be given combat missions against the Israelis. Additional pilots would probably be dispatched from the USSR. Assuming that Damascus was still in Syrian hands while the Russians had time to act, they would make its defense a first priority and would probably establish an airlift to bring in both equipment and ground force units for this purpose. We would expect that, if the fighting were protracted, the Soviets would steadily augment their fighting forces in Syria to the point where they had established a substantial presence. At some point, they might, in conjunction with the Egyptians, seek to create a diversion on the Suez front, nullifying the ceasefire there.

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A US RESCUE OPERATION

12. Even if the aim of such action was to protect the lives of US citizens there, the Russians would suspect the US of having additional motives or, at any rate, would foresee that the intervention, once begun, might become prolonged and enlarged, thereby expanding the US military presence in the area. On the other hand, the Russians could make easy propaganda and political play on the US' interventionist role. The US action, assuming it remained limited in duration and scope, would not, at the same time, represent any real challenge to the USSR's military prestige. We would expect Moscow's reaction to be mostly diplomatic and propagandistic rather than military.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

13. No matter what form US or Israeli intervention took, the Soviets would score from the impact it could be expected to have on Arab opinion. With emotions already aroused by the spectacle of an Arab civil war, mass public response to a US or Israeli intervention in Jordan could be highly explosive -- surpassing in intensity that seen over most of the Arab world at the time of the 1967 Arab-Israeli

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war. At worst, American embassies, places of business, and residents in much of the area would be attacked and there could be substantial loss of life. There would be intense pressures on Arab governments to retaliate against the US Government and against American citizens and commercial interests. In particular, demands would be made for the breaking of relations with the US and for sharp measures against US oil interests. The more clearcut the intervention, the longer it lasted, and the more apparent the degree of US-Israeli collusion, the worse the reaction would be.

14. Of all the present Arab governments, Libya, Syria, and Iraq would be the most likely to take punitive anti-American measures. The Libyans are, of course, in the best position to do so. But even regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Kuwait might feel obliged to take at least some steps, both to placate public opinion, and to demonstrate their solidarity with the Palestinians. This would be particularly the case if there were obvious US-Israeli collaboration in an intervention. The Soviets, of course, could be counted on to encourage a broad range of anti-US manifestations in the area.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DDCI

Although this memorandum has been somewhat overtaken by events, the Director asked me to give it limited distribution outside.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

Copies to: DDI
DDP
D/OCI

Attachment:

Memorandum, dated 25 Sept 70
"Likely Soviet Reactions to Possible
US or Israeli Actions Concerning Jordan"

25 Sept 70
(DATE)

(over for add dist)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Ray S. Cline

Although this memorandum has been somewhat overtaken by events, the Director asks me to pass it on to you.

ABBOT SMITH
Director
National Estimates

Attachment:

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Backslip + 2 cgs also sent to:

*Lt. Gen. Bennett
V. Adams Noel Gayler
Maj. Gen. Joseph M. Christian
R. Adam Philand Hartinger*

25 September 70
(DATE)

+ Maj Gen Rocky Sventapfel

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Tom Latimer

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Frank Hand

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ABBOT SMITH
Director
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